

New insights into the breeding areas, migration routes, staging, molting, and local movements associated with those Surf and White-winged Scoters wintering in the inner marine waters of Washington State

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Scoters have experienced significant declines in numbers over the last 25 years in the marine waters of Washington State; however little was known until recently of movements and population dynamics of the different wintering scoter populations on the west coast and how they might relate to each other. Studies started in 2003 in Washington using satellite and radio transmitters for the purpose of documenting the patterns of distribution and fidelity to winter and spring foraging areas, night concentrations, migration routes, range of breeding sites, and molting areas of those White-winged and Surf Scoters wintering in Washington. Two years of a four-year project have now been completed, suggesting the following: 1) Distinct differences in distribution and movement exist between the two main scoter species, between male and female scoters, and between different flyway subpopulations of scoters, such as San Francisco Bay and Puget Sound. 2) The time spent by scoters in marine areas is 9-10 months for males and 8-9 for females. 3) Western Washington contains important wintering and staging areas used by scoters. 4) Scoters return daily and yearly often to the same locations, expressing considerable site fidelity. 5) Several different patterns of scoter association with herring spawning were observed.